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Lisa K. Speer

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## Arkadelphians Play Baseball in Montana

Lisa K. Speer

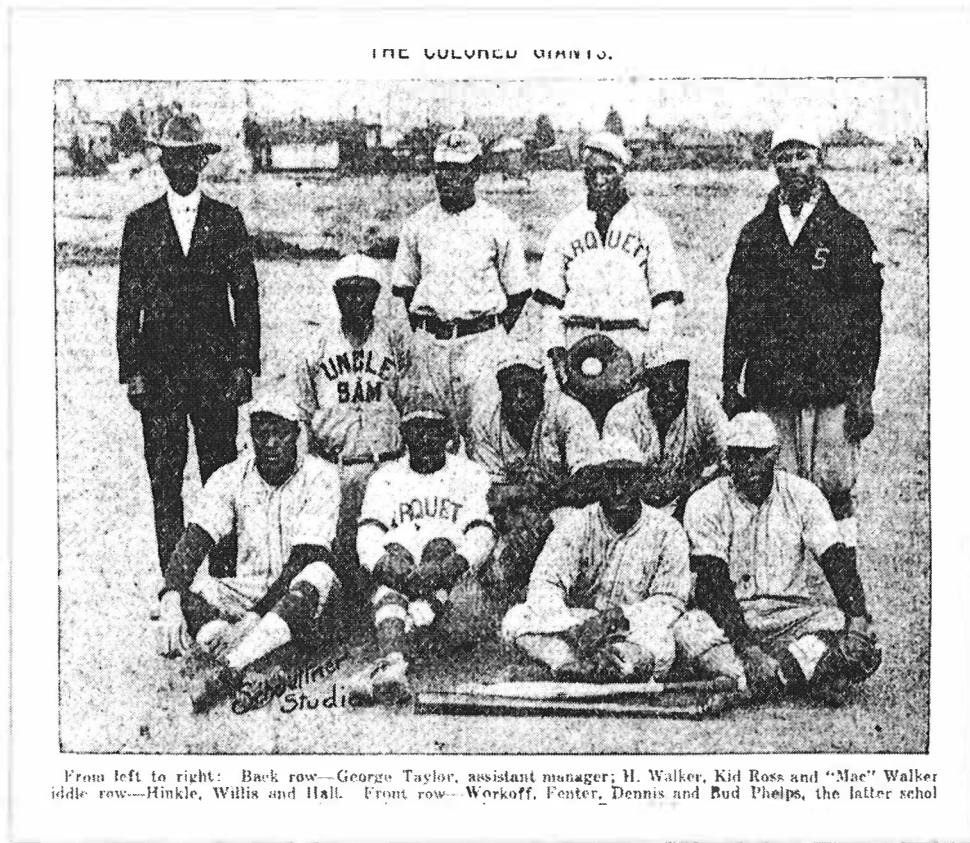
Perhaps a little known facet of Clark County history is its connection to Negro League baseball in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1917 and 1939, sixteen young men from Arkadelphia played baseball for the Butte Colored Giants in Montana.

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The Butte Colored Giants, a Negro League baseball team that played in Montana between 1917 and 1939, had strong ties to Clark County. During the twenty-two years of the team's existence, sixteen young men from Arkadelphia played for the Giants. Among the earliest players were Girlie Fenter and his brothers-in-law, McKinley, Ernest and Hobart Walker. The team first organized in 1917 as the Silver City Giants. The team owner was Frank Yamer, proprietor of a black nightclub in Butte, a prosperous mining town with an African American population of less than one per cent of the general population. As such, the Giants competed primarily against local white teams, a scenario unlikely to take place in the segregated American South.

In 1919, Codie "Stack" Spearman joined the team and played for the Giants on and off until 1935. Stack was one of three members of the Clark County Spearman family who would play for the Giants. Henry and Hayse Spearman both joined the team in 1933. Henry stayed one season. Hayse stayed for two seasons and returned again for the 1938-1939 season. Six of the seven sons of Iverson and Fannie Spearman of Clark County played various levels of Negro League baseball between 1911 and 1946. In addition to the sons who played for the Giants, Charles, Willie and Clyde also played professionally.

Claudie Beard, Sr., who played Negro League baseball between 1921 and 1936, also played for the Giants. During his fifteen-year career, Beard played for approximately eight teams, including the Vapor City Tigers (Hot Springs), and the McGehee All Stars in Arkansas. Outside Arkansas, Beard played with the Memphis Red Sox (1922), the Carroll City Giants (Los Angeles, 1924), the Fort Worth Panthers (1931), and most notably the Butte Colored Giants (1934-1936).



Courtesy of the *Butte Miner*, September 3, 1922

Other Clark County men who played for the Giants between 1933 and 1939 included: Clarence Crowe, Jesse Hatten, Luther Atkinson, Nick Jones, O'Dell Jackson, Richard Bizzle, and Touissant Atkinson. Doug Jackson, born in Louisiana, but listing Arkadelphia as his place of residence, managed the team from 1933 to 1936.

During their tenure, the Giants competed in several different leagues: the Butte Independent League (1922-1923); the Butte Intercity League (1934); and the Montana State League (1935-1936). In all other years, the team operated independently. The Giants won back-to-back championships in 1922 and 1923 in the otherwise all-white Butte Independent League. They won again in 1934 against the Anaconda Laurel Leafs in the Intercity League championships. In 1935, they were admitted as the only black team to the eight-team state league. In their last season, 1938-39, the Giants played independently under original owner, Frank Yamer. They attempted to organize again in 1940 but were unsuccessful in doing so. For 22 years, though, the Giants entertained fans from all walks of life and left a legacy as one of Montana's most successful and popular Negro League teams.

For essays on the Spearmans, Claudie Beard, Sr., and the Butte Colored Giants, please see the Arkansas Baseball Encyclopedia at: <http://arkbaseball.com/tiki-index.php>.